

An Interview with  
Mr. & Mrs. Tilghman Tucker  
October 7, 1975

Interviewed by

H. T. Holmes

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY  
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Interviewee: Tucker, Tilghman; Tucker, Mrs. Tilghman

Interviewer: Holmes, H. T.

Other

Participants: Rasberry, Mrs. James; Hamilton, Mrs. Charles G.;  
Hamilton, Charles Granville

Title: An interview with Mr. & Mrs. Tilghman Tucker with Mrs. James  
Rasberry, Mrs. Charles G. Hamilton and Charles Granville  
Hamilton, October 7, 1975 / interviewed by H. T. Holmes

**AU 866**

HOLMES: Could you tell me where you were born?

TUCKER: Yes sir, I was born in Monroe County, about three and a half miles south of Smithville.

HOLMES: Smithville?

TUCKER: Smithville, mmhmm.

HOLMES: How old was your father when you were born?

TUCKER: When I was born?

HOLMES: Yes sir.

TUCKER: I couldn't remember just how old he was. In fact, he didn't know his age exactly, but he knows it there about. When he was told as a slave, he was 70 years old, and he was 21 years old the year of the surrender. That's as near I can tell you about his age.

HOLMES: Well, what else did he tell you about the days when he was a slave?

TUCKER: Well, he said he, he said his master was good to him.

HOLMES: And this was Governor Tucker?

TUCKER: No, Governor Tucker's father, Johnny Tucker that was his name. He said he was mighty good to him. He said in cold weather, he'd sleep in his master's sleep to keep his sleep going, and he didn't know what it was to be whipped by him. He didn't whip him at all. He was nice to him.

HOLMES: Was he married before the war?

TUCKER: No sir. He didn't marry until after the war. He was 21 years old the year the surrender was.

HOLMES: Now, was he in Mississippi all during the war?

TUCKER: No sir, he was in Alabama, over there at the, I can't hardly think of that little old town, Bexar, that's where his father, his master owned the farm land here in Bexar.

HOLMES: Now, do you know where he was born, your father?

TUCKER: He was born in Kentucky, Hebbardsville, Kentucky.

HOLMES: Hebbardsville? And then he came down here when he was a young boy?

TUCKER: He was sold as a slave when he was seven years old.

HOLMES: Mmhmm, I see. He was sold to Mr. Tucker?

TUCKER: Yes sir, right here in Columbus, (inaudible) he was sold for 800 dollars. That's what he said his master give for him.

HOLMES: Does he know where his mother and father came from?

TUCKER: My father's mother and father?

HOLMES: Yes sir.

TUCKER: They was, really they belonged to Fisher, a man by the name of Fisher, in Kentucky, owned him, and my father changed his name after he was bought by Tucker. Fisher was really his first name, Simon Fisher.

HOLMES: And he changed his name to what?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: What did he change his name to?

TUCKER: Tucker.

HOLMES: Tucker? Simon Tucker?

TUCKER: Simon Tucker, but Simon Fisher was who he was born, when he was born.

HOLMES: Well, tell me something about your early childhood.

TUCKER: Well, my early childhood, I started school when I was about four years old.

HOLMES: That's early.

TUCKER: Yeah, they started me at school when I was about four years old, and I already knew my ABC's.

HOLMES: What kind of school was it?

TUCKER: What kind of school was it?

HOLMES: Yes sir.

TUCKER: It was just preschool.

HOLMES: Here in...

TUCKER: Over there in Monroe County.

HOLMES: Monroe County?

TUCKER: Yeah, just preschool there. No it was Jonesboro School.

HOLMES: Jonesboro?

TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: Was your father a farmer after the war?

TUCKER: That's the way it was, he was a farmer.

HOLMES: What did you study in school?

TUCKER: What did I study?

HOLMES: Yes sir.

TUCKER: Well first, I didn't have but one book, and that's the old blue back special, and I went through it and spelled all the words and read what was in it, and then, they put me in fourth reader. I skipped all those others. I could read well, they put me in fourth reader, I studied it, and finally picked up history, of course, and arithmetic, and Robinson's practical arithmetic. I greatly mastered it before I quit school. Robinson's Practical, I could work anything in it. The superintendent from Aberdeen finally examined us. He gave me a hundred percent on everything.

HOLMES: My goodness!

TUCKER: Told me I could go teaching school, but I never did teach school. (inaudible) until I could afford to work for it.

HOLMES: The school you were into, did it have any white kids in it or was it, were they all black people?

TUCKER: All black.

HOLMES: All black people? What year was this? Do you remember?

TUCKER: Last year I went to school was in, was it 1899 or 1900? Yeah, the fall, it was 1900, that was the last year I went to school.

HOLMES: Well, what did you do when you got through going to school?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: What did you do after school? Where'd you work?

TUCKER: Well, after school, see I was right at manhood then, I went to public work, saw milling, working at saw mills and things like that. That's when I wasn't farming.

HOLMES: Mmhhmm.

TUCKER: I'd go right on, get me a job at a saw mill or human cross ties for the Frisco Railroad or something like that.

HOLMES: Mmhhmm.

TUCKER: I've done hard work all my life up until I retired.

HOLMES: Mmhhmm, well that's a good way to make a living. Personally, I'd prefer another way.

TUCKER: Yeah, they paid such little for school teachers, and I just couldn't afford to teach for them. Had to make a little more money than that.

HOLMES: What do you remember about World War I?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: World War I?

TUCKER: World War I? Let's see, I was working, no, that was during the Spanish-American War.

HOLMES: Well, we can talk about that.

TUCKER: I was working in coal mines then, in Alabama. I worked in coal mines that fall, during the Spanish-American War.

HOLMES: Where were the coal mines?

TUCKER: Over there at Carbon Hill, yeah, over there at Carbon Hill, Elk River Mine,

It's done worked out now, and...

HOLMES: Well, how was that? Did you like it?

TUCKER: Well, I could make more money doing that, then anything else, you know?

HOLMES: Poor school teachers, that's probably what he's saying.

TUCKER: But I didn't like it too well. I wouldn't go down there in the mine now for nothing.

HOLMES: Me either! Do you remember who owned that mine?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: Do you know who owned the mine?

TUCKER: Elk River, no sir, I really can't say. I think a company, I don't know. I don't know who owned that mine.

HOLMES: Mmhhmm, and what else about the Spanish-American War?

TUCKER: Spanish-American War? I wasn't working in no public work in particular, I was on the farm.

HOLMES: Mmhhmm.

TUCKER: On the farm, and of course, when I wasn't farming, I would get a job at some saw mill or something like that.

HOLMES: Did, was there a lot of talk of the war in Monroe County?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: Were people concerned about the war, did they talk about it a lot?

TUCKER: Oh, they talked about it a whole lot, yes sir, they really did.

HOLMES: What kind of public reaction was there to it?

TUCKER: Well, they was just sorry for the boys that had to go, you know? That's about all I can say. I remember, during that war, when one of my neighbor's boy had to go. All of his friends and kinspeople come to his home, and they stayed up all night, praying and crying and carrying on. We stayed up past midnight at my home listening at them. Just couldn't sleep, couldn't rest.

HOLMES: It's a horrible thing.

TUCKER: Yes sir, it was. That is Ms. Aldmond (sp?), when Elli had to go.

HOLMES: What about the Ku Klux Klan? Did your daddy have some stories about that, or did you have some run-ins with them, or moments of insolence about it?

TUCKER: He got along with them pretty well, the Ku Klux, he never really had any trouble with them, but I've heard him tell about others.

HOLMES: What was that?

TUCKER: Just, you know, colored people would travel at night, go out at night, against their master's will, and the Ku Klux would wait for them, catch them, whip them.

HOLMES: Just like I read about in the history books.

TUCKER: Yeah, I've heard him tell about that.

HOLMES: Was it very active in this part of the state?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: Was the Ku Klux Klan active in this part of the state? In Monroe County?

TUCKER: They used to be pretty active here, my father said, yes.

HOLMES: Do you remember anything? Any differences, any changes that the war made?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: Do you remember any changes that the war made in Monroe County? Were things different after the war?

TUCKER: Well, yes sir, I do. Well, since the Civil War, when it was over, the colored people were free. It freed them, and they could go and live wherever they pleased. And of course, despite the World War I, it changed things awful, to me like, it just made a new worry for me.

HOLMES: But here in Monroe County, what changes took place?

TUCKER: In Monroe County? Well, it gives the colored man the right to vote.



HOLMES: Now World War I?

TUCKER: No, I don't reckon it did. He didn't get that right then, did he?

HOLMES: No, not really.

TUCKER: No, he didn't.

MRS. TUCKER: Now, he's talking about your mother's schooling now, in Smithville.

TUCKER: Yes, she went to school at Smithville, and I'm not certain if she went to a school building or a private home, I'm not certain which, but she went to school at Smithville.

HOLMES: Now when was this?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: When?

MRS. TUCKER: Do you remember the year?

TUCKER: No, I don't. I don't remember the year.

(BACKGROUND VOICE): 1865

HOLMES: Where was your mother from? Was your mother born here?

TUCKER: She was born in Monroe County. She was born in Monroe County. She belonged to Mrs. Dean, a widow woman.

HOLMES: Now, does she know where her parents came from?

TUCKER: Her parents? Well, my mother was half white.

HOLMES: I see. Well, that explains where she came from. So what happened? When she got through with school at Westville? In Smithville, excuse me.

TUCKER: She married shortly after that, I think.

HOLMES: And then decided to raise a family?

TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

TUCKER: I had one brother and one sister.

HOLMES: And what were their names?

TUCKER: My sister was named Lina, she's dead now. My brother's name was Zach, Zachariah, he's dead.

HOLMES: Well, now let's see, we left you, you were working in the coal mines, and you were doing public works, as you called it. And, you worked in the coal mine during the Spanish-American War.

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: The coal mines, you worked during the Spanish-American War, alright what did you do after that? Do you remember?

TUCKER: Farm, I went back to the farm.

HOLMES: Here, in Monroe County?

TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: And you did that for most of your life?

TUCKER: Farmed in Monroe County all my life.

HOLMES: Talking about making shingles.

TUCKER: Yes, I used to run the shingle mill. (inaudible) when she was a kid.

HOLMES: How did you make the shingles?

TUCKER: My horse power. I had a wheel go round and round and a sash up and down my knife, when it would come down, it would make a shingle, and then it would go back up. Oh it cut right now. If I couldn't cut ten thousand in a day, I was in trouble. And there, I made some money.

HOLMES: What kind of wood would you use? Cedar? Cedar wood? Cypress?

TUCKER: No, I could cut through cypress, but very few cypress shingles I cut. But there wasn't any cypress in that part of the country much. I used mostly poplar and pine, hard pine.

HOLMES: Ten thousand a day, that's a lot.

TUCKER: Wasn't no trouble for me to cut ten thousand a day.

HOLMES: Now, you did this kind of on the side? This wasn't your main job, was it?

TUCKER: Nothing I do that (inaudible).

HOLMES: I'm interested in the stories you were told as a child. Remember any family stories, or fairy stories, do you remember any of those?

TUCKER: Told where?

HOLMES: When you were a child.

TUCKER: Oh, no sir. Wasn't very interested in one somehow or another about fairy tales.

MRS. TUCKER: What about ghost stories?

TUCKER: There was.

HOLMES: Ghost stories?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: Ghost stories?

TUCKER: I was very interested in them. Aunt Ruthie Gildon could tell things that would scare us children near to death with, you wait for the light to go out at night.

HOLMES: Do you remember any of them?

TUCKER: No sir, I don't. Not well enough to tell.

HOLMES: I get scared very easily.

MRS. TUCKER: Who's Aunt Ruthie Gildon?

TUCKER: An old lady that lived about seven or eight miles from us. She would often come visit us, though, come and stay all night. She thought a heap of my mother and father and she would tell them ghost stories whenever she was ready to go to bed.

MRS. TUCKER: Wasn't Aunt Ruthie African-born? Like, I heard that she was. Wasn't she born in Africa?

TUCKER: Who? Aunt Ruthie?

MRS. TUCKER: Uh huh.

TUCKER: Not that I know of.

MRS. TUCKER: I thought I heard that she was.

TUCKER: I don't reckon that she was. She had a sister named Ellen. You know this (inaudible)

MRS. TUCKER: Was she related to you or you just called her that name?

TUCKER: She wasn't any relation to me; we just called her Aunt Ruthie.

MRS. TUCKER: Affectionately called her that, right?

TUCKER: Because she was old.

MRS. TUCKER: Well now, who cut the trees down for you to make the shingles?

TUCKER: Who?

MRS. TUCKER: Who cut the trees down for you to make your shingles?

TUCKER: Oh, I would hire the boys to saw them down and saw the box off. Help do it, and I would do a lot of it myself.

(UNKNOWN): You might have to put them in a big, what do they call it? A vat and cook them, make them softer.

TUCKER: Yeah, them great big old pines. That big saw. Great big heart. Sap wouldn't be no thicker than that. And we'd use that sap for stove wood, and sell it. I could sell it.

MRS. TUCKER: Tell him how you would prepare the material to make the shingles. What did you do? What shape did you get them in?

TUCKER: Well, when you cut that tree down, and saw them off in blocks, and knock the sap off with the ax, and then we'd bolt that timber. First thing we'd do was just half that block. And then we'd bolt it in the shape we wanted it, you know, split it in the shape we wanted it.

MRS. TUCKER: Did you boil the wood?

TUCKER: Boiled it, boiled it good. Hot through and through.

HOLMES: How long would that take? To boil it?

TUCKER: Well, it would take something like a couple hours. It would have to boil that long. At least a couple hours.

MRS. TUCKER: How did you boil it?

TUCKER: I had a vat.

MRS. TUCKER: Well tell them about it.

TUCKER: It had, not tin, but what do you call it on the bottom of it?

MRS. TUCKER: Sheet metal

TUCKER: Galvanize. That's what I'm trying to say. That galvanize stuff from the bottom. And you see, turn that galvanize up on the side of the box and nail it good, so it wouldn't leak, and it would hold water, and then we'd put the timber in there and boil it. That's how I did it. Put that box down on the furnace and de-gummed it, fire it.

HOLMES: Did you tend the fire?

MRS. TUCKER: How did you lift those hot logs, the hot pieces?

TUCKER: Well, I'd use this hand to push it to the blade with and catch the shingle over here. It'd burn you some, but I got tougher (inaudible). I got to tell the truth.

HOLMES: How did you get started doing that?

TUCKER: Well, there was a white man that had a shingle mill east of where we lived and we bought the first part of my blade, we bought our first blade and slash from him. He quit and cut up all the timber back in there, his part, and he sold me the outfit. That's how I got started.

HOLMES: And did pretty good if you made ten thousand a day.

TUCKER: And I wore that blade out and I ordered me a new blade. I never did know what become of my blade, I never went back to the old place to get it when I quit.

MRS. TUCKER: How large was it, about how many inches or feet?

TUCKER: The blade?

MRS. TUCKER: Yeah, about how wide was it?

TUCKER: Oh, about something like...

MRS. TUCKER: About a foot and a half?

TUCKER: It was about that long.

MRS. TUCKER: About two feet?

TUCKER: No, no, not two feet. It wasn't two feet.

MRS. TUCKER: Uh huh, how long was it?

TUCKER: And it fastened to that frame, you see? The frame and the (inaudible)

HOLMES: How much would you sell the shingles for?

TUCKER: Well, I first started selling them for two dollars a pound. Amory was growing at that time, and using more shingles, and so I went up to two and a half. Sold that way a while, and finally I got up to three dollars, three dollars a pound.

MRS. TUCKER: You sold some for four when I was bailing.

TUCKER: Yeah, yeah I think I did. I shipped some shingles. There was a church being built between here and Corinth, somewhere in there, and a preacher by the name of Mims, I never did forget it, heard of me having shingles to sell, and he wrote me a letter. And I never did see Mr. Mims, but I shipped them, a car load up there. I had a car set, shipped them, a car load.

TUCKERS WIFE: How did you haul them to Amory to ship them?

TUCKER: Yes ma'am, I hauled them by my wagon. Put them on the train, shipped them up there.

HOLMES: Now, was two dollars a thousand? If you could do ten thousand a day, that'd be 20 dollars a day, if you could sell ten thousand a day. Was that, then, a lot of money?

TUCKER: Oh yeah.

HOLMES: I guess it would be now, to come to think of it.

TUCKER: More money than I could make doing anything else.

HOLMES: Now, how often could you sell ten thousand shingles?

TUCKER: How often? Every week. I'd cut sometimes a whole week, the biggest part of the week. And then again, the people would come and haul them away. People would come to the shingle mill and get them.

MRS. TUCKER: What did you bail them with? What kind of material did you bail them up?

TUCKER: Wire, tied them out with wire.

HOLMES: How many people did you have working with you?

TUCKER: We wasn't needing nobody, only some kids or nothing to just drive the mules and somebody to just wait on the box, you see? Put the timber on the table for me, and that's about all. Somebody to bail the shingles, and most any child could learn to bail the shingles in a little while. See, my children was a big help to me.

HOLMES: How many shingles in a bail?

MRS. TUCKER: 200, 250.

HOLMES: And were they stacked on top of each other?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir.

(Many people speaking at once)

TUCKER: No, no, I guaranteed my shingles, I guaranteed my shingles. When I'd sell them, I'd have (inaudible) shingles, or a thousand shingles, or 5,000 shingles, I'd tell him, you keep up with all that you can't use, and I'll make them good. And I never have (inaudible).

HOLMES: Hmm, That's wonderful. It really is.

TUCKER: Never have, I guaranteed my shingles. I had the name of cutting the best shingles of any mill, any mill.

HOLMES: Well, those are all very interesting. Do you like to sing?

TUCKER: Sir?

HOLMES: Do you like to sing, to sing songs?

TUCKER: To sing?

HOLMES: Do you like to?

TUCKER: Well, I do love music. I used to teach music.

HOLMES: Did you really?

TUCKER: But I've lost my voice nearly. I ain't much to do with the singing now, but I do my best, I still try. I love it too well to quit.

HOLMES: Where did you teach?

TUCKER: I taught some in Alabama, I taught there at home.

HOLMES: What kind of music did you teach?

TUCKER: Sacred music, church music.

HOLMES: Sacred harp? Just shape note singing. You'd have a singing school then, a singing convention? Is that what they were called?

TUCKER: Yeah, we'd have a, we'd have a singing convention in Monroe County. We meet every year, the second Sunday in August, convention day.

MRS. TUCKER: But when you was teaching, you had school, didn't you, singing school?

TUCKER: Yeah.

HOLMES: How long would the singing school last?

TUCKER: Oh something like 10 days.

HOLMES: Every, and it would meet every day?

TUCKER: 10 days, 15.

(mumbling between people)

HOLMES: What's your favorite song?

TUCKER: Well, I have several favorite songs.

(sings one of his favorites)

HOLMES: I don't think you've lost your voice.

TUCKER: That's one of my favorites.



(UNKNOWN): Tell them about that church you used to go to.

TUCKER: Well, I remember the church there in Amory, the Church of Christ. I remember there.

(UNKNOWN): Did you used to go to St. Paul's?

TUCKER: Oh yes.

(UNKNOWN): Tell him about St. Paul's.

TUCKER: Yes sir, I used to go out there to church, but I'm a member of the Church of Christ there in Amory. That's where I owe my membership.

TUCKERS WIFE: Now, but you went to church at St. Paul's for all of your life.

TUCKER: Oh yeah, yeah.

(UNKNOWN): Well now, aren't some of your people buried out there in New Hope Cemetery? They used to bury Blacks out in New Hope Farnham Cemetery.

TUCKER: Sir?

(UNKNOWN): Haven't you been to funerals at New Hope Farnham Cemetery out there?

TUCKER: Been to funerals?

MRS. TUCKER: Say your people are all up there and out there.

TUCKER: Yeah, a whole lot funerals.

(UNKNOWN): This is one of the oldest cemeteries in the county, there's an 1826 marker out there. And there's buried Black and Whites.

TUCKER: I own a lot there, I bought for when she...they done filled that cemetery up. It's the Farnham's boy owns the land joining it and he give them a chance at buying some lots there and I bought them up, paid for it, and ain't but one person buried on it and that's my daughter-in-law, Ernest's wife.

MRS. TUCKER: Does she have a marker?

TUCKER: No.

MRS. TUCKER: Does she have a stone at her grave?

TUCKER: Yes ma'am,

MRS. TUCKER: And what date was that? Do you remember?

TUCKER: (inaudible) can't come right now. I sure can't.

(many people talking at once)

MRS. TUCKER: Was your mother and father buried at New Hope?

TUCKER: Yes ma'am.

MRS. TUCKER: And they have stones?

TUCKER: Yes ma'am, I wouldn't rest until I had stones put there.

(UNKNOWN): Tell them about the time you came to vote a few years ago.

TUCKER: Sir?

(UNKNOWN): Tell them about the time you came to vote a few years ago and they wouldn't let you. When you came to register.

MRS. TUCKER: You know, when you came over here to register and they wouldn't let you register. Told them it was critical times now and you would come back later, you had to think about it.

TUCKER: Well...

MRS. TUCKER: Who was it then? Do you remember who it was?

TUCKER: No.

(UNKNOWN): Was it Mr. Riddled?

TUCKER: I don't remember now.

MRS. TUCKER: Was it Mr. Young? Was it Aaron Young? That was circuit clerk at that time and told you it was turbulent times and you better not register?

TUCKER: I can't remember now just who it was, I don't remember.

MRS. TUCKER: Now how did you feel voting this last summer?

TUCKER: Well, I was very happy to have that privilege, something I never have had before.

HOLMES: How many times did you try to register?

TUCKER: Well I didn't try many times, they just didn't allow me to register, and I knew it so I didn't attempt to.

HOLMES: Did you try when you were a young man?

TUCKER: I hate to be mistreated. Whenever I know that I ain't gonna get a thing, I just go on.

HOLMES: When you were a young man, did you try to register?

TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: And they turned you back then?

TUCKER: I've voted one time, that was for this cotton question, years ago. I think that was my first vote.

HOLMES: What was that? What was the cotton question?

TUCKER: It allowed all farmers, you see, to cast the vote, rather than have government control or not.

HOLMES: How did you vote?

TUCKER: I voted for government control.

HOLMES: And then you voted last summer for the first time?

TUCKER: Yes sir. That was the first time I voted in a general election.

MRS. TUCKER: You got your picture in the paper that time, didn't you?

TUCKER: Sure did.

(UNKNOWN): Tell us about when you were a school trustee.

TUCKER: Well, I didn't mind to be. I wanted to be on the (inaudible). I enjoyed being a trustee.

HOLMES: Of what school?

TUCKER: In Jonesboro. Oh I don't know, I was a trustee there for years. I was a trustee there until they moved the school. Moved it from there to Smithville.

(UNKNOWN): How did you meet her? How did you meet your wife?

TUCKER: Well, the truth is, my children was all small, and I was seeking a wife. I talked (inaudible) with young people, with young women, but I realized that I didn't need these younger women for a wife. And so, there was a preacher at that time, preaching there for us regular and so he told me about this woman, she lived in Tishomingo County. He lived in Corinth and he preached to her place every now and then, and he preached for us monthly. He preached for us over there at my home, and so he told me about her. He told me, said she's lost her husband and that she's a mighty fine woman, and she's a Christian lady, and a school teacher. He says, Tucker, you need that woman to help you raise these children. Children's all small. Willie Mae was just large enough to... I believe you was teaching school yourself, wasn't you? But the rest of them, they was all small and so I had no help but my mother. She was an old lady. But my mother couldn't teach them nothing, only what she knew. She was born in slavery times. She didn't know much. Couldn't teach them nothing, only hard work. I got stubborn over that, and I sit down and wrote this one a little letter. (inaudible) and she answers the letter, we need to have a meeting in Corinth pretty soon. And of course, I believe she (inaudible) So, I met my wife, and me and her, we didn't get engaged that day (inaudible). We was gonna have a meeting then, following that same summer, at home, and brother Hammond, that same preacher, was gonna hold it. And so he come around there to hold a meeting, and sure enough, she comes, visiting that meeting. And she didn't stay at my house, she stayed at brother Merch's. But of course, it wasn't but a little piece up to brother Merch's, and I went right on up there that night. Stayed with her 'til bedtime, talked with her, and me and her engaged one of them nights, and I married her shortly after that.

HOLMES: Would you like equal time? Would you like to talk about your education or background? I was talking to your wife.

MRS. TUCKER: We have some good stories to tell (inaudible)

HOLMES: Were you born in Monroe County?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir. Down here in Mulden.

HOLMES: Mulden?

MRS. TUCKER: Yeah Mulden.

HOLMES: And may I ask you where your parents came from? Do you know?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, my mother (inaudible) her home that she was born and raised in. She

was a Macfarland, Mr. and Mrs. Macfarland, and my father, he worked for Dr. Sykes, not Dr. Sykes, it was, what was his name? It was a Walker, anyway, he belonged to. That's why he was named Felix Walker, he took his master's name, and he was born right there in Muir, where I was born.

HOLMES: They were both born here, do you know where their parents came from?

MRS. TUCKER: No sir, I don't. I don't even know anything about any grandparent or...

HOLMES: And your parents didn't remember, or didn't tell you?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, they talk about them sometime, tell us about them, how they were reared and all, but that didn't have much to do with them.

HOLMES: Were they in Mississippi though?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes, both Mississippi (inaudible), and I've been in Mississippi all these 90 years.

HOLMES: Well, it's a nice place.

MRS. TUCKER: Oh, I know it.

HOLMES: Well, y'all have seen a lot of changes in 90 years, haven't you?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: Lots of things have come and gone, and lots of changes have been made. What about your schooling, now?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, I only went to public school. (inaudible) as far as high school is as far as I managed school.

HOLMES: Now, where public school? Here in Monroe County again?

MRS. TUCKER: Correction, we went to college at Okolona College (People Talking at same time) we finished there. We finished at Okolona.

HOLMES: Well, that counts.

(two conversations at once)

HOLMES: Well, when you finished your schooling when you were young, what did you do?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, for a long time, I just worked at home, until a friend of mine wanted

help in the school that he was teaching.

HOLMES: You were teaching at home?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes, I taught there. When I began teaching I made 15 dollars a month.

HOLMES: Now, what year was that?

MRS. TUCKER: I believe that was in about 1912, I think, when I started. When the Titanic went down, that's when I started.

HOLMES: That same year? Well, you had an auspicious beginning. What size school did you teach in?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, it was just a small school. I taught from the first through the eighth grade, but then, you know, there wasn't much grading done, and you know, I couldn't teach that many children myself. You know, teaching *Hansel & Gretel*.

HOLMES: Was it a one room school, right in the country there?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir, sometimes probably (inaudible)

HOLMES: What kind of help did you get from the county as far as supplies? Did they provide you anything at all?

MRS. TUCKER: Not anything at all.

HOLMES: No textbooks or nothing?

MRS. TUCKER: No, parents had to furnish that.

HOLMES: Were most parents able to furnish them textbooks for their children?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, they had to do the best they could.

HOLMES: And you had to too, with what you had?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes, yes. But the white people, they helped us a lot with our books. My mother would wash and ironed for white people and her friends would give their children their books as they, you know, as they passed along, as they go from one grade to another, keep giving us their books. We didn't have many books. They'd swap out with the other children.

(UNKNOWN): What was the name of your school?

MRS. TUCKER: Um, Saks Chaplin.

(UNKNOWN): Where was it located?

MRS. TUCKER: About three miles south, southwest of Mulden.

(UNKNOWN): Is that where Alec Chandler lived?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: When you were teaching, what were you trying to achieve? When they would finish the eighth grade, what would you expect for your students to be able to do?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, they just, you know, they just studied their readers and arithmetic, and things like that, you know, geographies, English.

HOLMES: And when they left the eighth grade, would many of them go on to school?

MRS. TUCKER: Much, not many.

HOLMES: What kind of opportunities were available for them after the eighth grade?

MRS. TUCKER: Not any much. It was a colored school and (inaudible) and Mary Holmes College. A few of the children around went there years after I was out of school.

HOLMES: When was Mary Holmes established?

MRS. TUCKER: I don't remember a year. (people muttering)

(UNKNOWN): It's a reconstruction school.

HOLMES: It is? But it did offer higher education for the bright people there?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir. Also taught to do us cooking, little crafts, and things like that, that (inaudible)

(UNKNOWN): It was the northern Presbyterians.

HOLMES: Who was Mary Holmes, do you know?

MRS. TUCKER: All I know they was from the north. The northern people came down here and setup that school.

(UNKNOWN): They had white teachers, didn't they?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes ma'am

HOLMES: Did they ever have black teachers?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, no sir, not in those days.

HOLMES: Not then?

MRS. TUCKER: They have colored teachers now, don't they?

(UNKNOWN): They had only white ones in 1930.

HOLMES: Did, in the educational system in the county, did you have white people teaching black children?

MRS. TUCKER: No sir.

HOLMES: And of course, there were no black teachers teaching white children?

MRS. TUCKER: No sir.

HOLMES: You said you taught at home for a while and then you went to join a friend with a school?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: Where was that?

MRS. TUCKER: At West Point

HOLMES: And what was that school?

MRS. TUCKER: Just a country school. Public school.

HOLMES: Just, you went to teach there? It was a public school?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir. I was assistant.

HOLMES: And it was the two of you there?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir.

HOLMES: How long were you there?

TUCKERS WIFE: I taught there single years after, well, three years as an assistant.



HOLMES: Now, this was in West Point?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes sir, in the country.

HOLMES: In the country? Did you ever teach in the city school?

TUCKER: No sir.

HOLMES: I was wondering if you could compare the differences between the country and the city schools.

MRS. TUCKER: No sir, and I wasn't prepared to teach at all, but this friend just persuaded me to teach because my father died and I had to go to work, you know, to help take care of my mother and three grandchildren. And so, after he died, we lived with my brother, and he was married and of course it was tight times for us because he had his family to take care of and of course they came first. I always was willing to do most anything to help my mother and so a colored teacher there, Evan (inaudible), he was said to be the best in the county, and he got after me and told me, he got to talking with me and told me he would get me some work in school if I would cook. I was cooking for professor Ebbett (inaudible) dairy barn, around a dairy barn. And I was cooking for them for five dollars a month.

(UNKNOWN): Jimmy's the one I remember. (inaudible)

HOLMES: What did you have to do to become a teacher? Did you take a test or...

MRS. TUCKER: Take an examination, yes sir. Finish second grade.

HOLMES: Second grade?

MRS. TUCKER: See, I wasn't qualified to teach English, that's why I didn't want to teach it, but he said, (inaudible) you know, I'm a friend of his, he would help me that much.

HOLMES: Now you would take the test, and dependent upon your score, would be the grade you received? It was one test, and it was just determined by the grade?

MRS. TUCKER: Mmhhmm.

(UNKNOWN): Didn't you teach at Jonesboro for years?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes, I taught there at Jonesboro after I got re married.

(UNKNOWN): That's what I thought; did you teach your own children?

MRS. TUCKER: I taught all my children out of school.

(UNKNOWN): That's right.

(UNKNOWN): Did you teach your husband's children?

MRS. TUCKER: Out of school.

(UNKNOWN): When did you decide to go to Okolona College?

MRS. TUCKER: Well, I see I didn't go as far as I wanted to go and I was trying to teach, I wanted to improve myself as much as I could. And they were having summer school at that time and well, after I married, I had the chance to go to summer school. That's why I went to Okolona.

(UNKNOWN): They didn't want my step-children in.

(UNKNOWN): Did you teach her? Did you teach Mr. Raspberry?

MRS. TUCKER: No, he was teaching me and didn't have time to listen to me. He was teaching himself. (inaudible/several people chiming in), we both was teaching in the college at Okolona at that time.

HOLMES: What about you registering to vote?

MRS. TUCKER: I registered when he did. I had never tried voting before. I never tried to.

HOLMES: Well, well, that, I was coming up during the time of the 60s, and all of the things that happened before that are really alien to me, because the way things are now, you know, are getting to be the way that I know them. It's interesting and sad to hear all the stories and the things of the way it was.

(Inaudible conversation between the unknown people in the room)

(UNKNOWN): When we had that Texas decision, which said that the Democratic Party was not a private party, it was a de facto government agency, and that everybody would have to be allowed to take a part in it, and that's when they had trouble. They came up with the grandfather clause and all those things, and uh, but anybody would be eligible to register, (inaudible) understand a part of the constitution's been read to him. However, the clerk asks the judge to whether you understood it or not. So if he says, you read the letter perfect, and either if you didn't understand it, he wouldn't let you register to vote.

(UNKNOWN): That's what my daddy did, he read it. He is a good reader and he read the

article perfectly, it was the man who gave his interrogation (Inaudible) well, I have to agree with you but you can't register now, and sometimes it's not right.

HOLMES: Now, what year was that?

(UNKNOWN): Let me see, what year was that? It was something like 20 years ago.

(UNKNOWN): 60s, early 60s.

(UNKNOWN): About the early 60s.

(UNKNOWN): My brother-in-law, about the same time, Earl had trouble getting registered. They would let you register when you put hadn't your name in the book, and things like that.

(UNKNOWN): They asked one black professor in Hattiesburg to interpret the constitution, how many bubbles are on a bar of soap.

HOLMES: Oh my Lord. Now, when you were registered, before the Texas decision, because you're either voting...

(UNKNOWN): No, no, we had a number of people who did vote and it wasn't a problem at all. They had one, they could vote the Republican ticket, and there was only one other advantage added to that. It didn't mean anything who the Republican people or who the Democratic ticket. But when you had a Republican President and a post office becomes bigger, then a local Republican would have to recommend somebody for the post office. And white men who wanted the job would go to every black Republican in their community and solicit info and get his recommendation. That's where they got the post office. That was the only thing (inaudible).

(UNKNOWN): Was the whole Republican County Committee out in the college there?

(UNKNOWN): Oh yes.

(UNKNOWN): When it was cleared, and when we were working on trying to get it cleared, we said, you have to pay poll taxes for two years, and it wouldn't accept a check. You could send your check in and they wouldn't take it. They would send the whole thing back to you, you know if you sent it in.

(UNKNOWN): I wouldn't accept your poll tax money unless you were registered, and there were none that were registered, unless your poll tax dues.

(UNKNOWN): So we kept on, and then finally we just paid poll tax. We just, Marlee, you were the first in there, there might have been one or two before you, we just

went on and insisted on paying the poll tax for two years and got a receipt. Kept paying on it and got a receipt. When we went back to the register, we had to take the examination. The man knew us so well. He'd been, he wouldn't flunk us. He told us that we passed alright, but he did not send our names, or tell us we had to carry our names down to the hole. So when voting time came we still wasn't registered.

HOLMES: For the city elections?

(UNKNOWN): Mmhhmm.

(UNKNOWN): No, it was the state elections.

HOLMES: Oh, for the state elections?

(UNKNOWN): So, we lost out that year. But we were ready for them the next year. We had everything...

HOLMES: Now when was this?

(UNKNOWN): This was eight, nine years ago. We had the suit here, at the courthouse here. You might have been up there. And he had the man up at the, the, he was a seventh grade student himself, and we had two or three people there with masters degrees he had turned down. When Jared got through with him, he was crying. I really did feel sorry for the man, as bad as he had treated us, I was sorry for him because he left that hole crying just like a baby.

(UNKNOWN): It was Katie?

HOLMES: No, no, a seventh grade man.

(UNKNOWN): No, this man, whenever he tried to register, is he, Justice of the Peace?

(UNKNOWN): He was the Justice of the Peace, and he was Deputy Circuit Clerk and Deputy...

(UNKNOWN): Chancery?

(UNKNOWN): Chancery Clerk

(UNKNOWN): He was everything.

(UNKNOWN): (Inaudible) They elected him circuit clerk and chancery clerk. I was in Houston, and the deputy was appointed. No matter who was chancery clerk, or circuit clerk, you could always have that job and (inaudible) take all three of them and make a (inaudible).

(UNKNOWN): That means he had just a seventh grade education trying to keep you folks with master's degrees from voting.

MRS. TUCKER: And he kept us.

(UNKNOWN): When we were young, did you used to come to Aberdeen? Did you come to Aberdeen when you were young?

TUCKER: Yes sir.

(UNKNOWN): How'd you come, by wagon?

TUCKER: Yes sir. I can't believe that it was even a wagon, it was ox wagon. We rode from up away from up there where we lived to Aberdeen on that ox wagon.

HOLMES: How long did it take?

TUCKER: Well, we made it, we made it to Aberdeen just before sundown, and spent the night, you know?

HOLMES: You had started before sunrise?

TUCKER: Yes sir.

(UNKNOWN): You had to come to town to pay your taxes?

TUCKER: Yes ma'am.

(UNKNOWN): Well now, didn't they all charge you poll taxes even though you couldn't vote?

TUCKER: Yes ma'am.

(UNKNOWN): They said the poll taxes went to the school. And they made you pay poll taxes, but wouldn't let you vote?

TUCKER: That's right. Not only that, I paid a special school tax when they moved that school to Smithville. I paid a special tax of 22 and three dollars every year until that school was paid for. It was supposed to be paid for in about 20 years. Either way, every time I paid that special tax every year and my children (inaudible).

(UNKNOWN): And that was for the white children, wasn't it?

TUCKER: Ma'am?

(UNKNOWN): Was that for the white children to go to that school?

MRS. TUCKER: Yes, nothing but whites.

TUCKER: Oh no, it was the white children.

(UNKNOWN): And you were paying taxes for it?

TUCKER: I tried to get out of that. I went to the.....(tape stops, restarts) but I said, my children going to this school up here in Jonesboro, and walking from my home up there and me paying that 20 something odd dollars every year on the tax, I want y'all to relieve me of that. He said, well, I can't do it (inaudible).

(UNKNOWN): When did you first see a black child on a school bus?

TUCKER: Sir?

(UNKNOWN): When did you first see a black child on a school bus? 1960 or something?

TUCKER: Let's see, I don't remember, no.

(All talking at once. Tape stops, then turns back on while many conversations are happening. Tape stops again, comes back on.)

TUCKER: He's a real smart boy. I'd have to say that to start with. And I saw it when he was just, he was just a little boy. He was playing with other children, but when it came time for him to read his book, he knew to leave them boys and he better sit down and get his book and go read it. I marked him then. He was just, gonna make good, and he had made good. He's now, he's now a writer for one of Washington's outstanding papers. Lives in Washington D.C.

HOLMES: That's a grand achievement.

TUCKER: He's really a smart boy.

HOLMES: Who is this? Is this your...

TUCKER'S DAUGHTER: That's my oldest son, his grandson, and when we found out he was a columnist, he said, we got to get that thing, we don't care what it costs us because I got to read his article. So we had to pay...

TUCKER: He made a trip here. Was it last year or the year before last, to Africa, South

Africa?

TUCKER'S  
DAUGHTER: It's been about three years.

HOLMES: Is he a political columnist?

TUCKER'S  
DAUGHTER: Pardon?

HOLMES: Political?

(UNKNOWN): He was the Okolona school...

(people talking over each other)

**END OF RECORDING**